

Why the world went ape over Jessica

From a Hollywood bimbo to \$2.5 million a film . . . that's not monkeying around!

JESSICA LANGE is back before the cameras in Chicago making *Men Don't Leave*, in which she plays a woman who's struggling to cope after her husband dies suddenly, leaving her to bring up two children alone.

It's her 11th major movie and her salary is \$2.5 million — not bad for an actress whose career was almost crushed by a giant mechanical ape before it began.

Until she made *The Postman Always Rings Twice* in 1980, she seemed to be just another blonde Hollywood bimbo who had screamed her way to brief fame four years earlier, lying half-naked in the palm of a huge gorilla in the laughable remake of *King Kong*.

"Kong" was supposed to make her a star. Instead she became an industry joke. "A lot of people



thought that would be the end of my career," says Jessica, who couldn't get another part for two years.

A love affair with director Bob Fosse eventually led to a small part in his autobiographical film *All That Jazz*. But her next effort, *How To Beat The High Cost Of Living*, was a box-office disaster and her career was back at square one.

Then came *The Postman Always*

ABOVE: Jessica Lange . . . "I think of myself more as a character actress."

LEFT: In the palm of *King Kong*'s hand.

She had that inviting quality that men can't refuse

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Rings Twice. And suddenly the critics sat up and took notice of Lange, then 31, as she steamed up the screen with her sexually-charged portrayal of Cora, who conspires with a lustful drifter (played by Jack Nicholson) to free her of her loveless marriage.

"I saw something behind the beauty that suggested a black depth," says "Postman" director Bob Rafelson. "She had that inviting quality that men can't refuse and then they can't escape when she gets her claws into them."

"Maybe I'm really like that," says Jessica, now 39 and the mother of three children, the oldest by former boyfriend Mikhail Baryshnikov and the others by her current live-in love, playwright and actor Sam Shepard, 44.

Nicholson, who violently seduces Jessica on a kitchen table in "Postman", describes her as "a delicate fawn crossed with a Buick". He says: "She has this shyness that's as sexy as anything else about her. She really gets genuinely embar-

rassed when you give her a compliment. She looks away and turns red."

"Postman" was not a blockbuster at cinemas, but it provided a showcase for the talents of Lange, who studied mime in Paris and worked as a model before taking up acting at the age of 24.

She was nominated for an Academy Award for her next movie, *Frances*, the story of tortured

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Thirties star Frances Farmer. And her performance as a sympathetic TV soap opera actress whom Dustin Hoffman falls for in *Tootsie* won her the Best Supporting Actress Oscar in 1983.

Oscar nominations didn't stop there. She got one in 1984 for *Country* — the film she made with Shepard about a farming family falling on hard times — and an-

RIGHT: Jessica with Jack Nicholson in *The Postman Always Rings Twice* ... critics sat up and took notice.

other the next year for *Sweet Dreams*, the bitter-sweet story of singer Patsy Kline.

Her Midas touch continued last year with the box-office hit *Crimes Of The Heart* (opposite Diane Keaton and Sissy Spacek), playing the trashy Meg.

"I like to see and make movies that are about real people," says the actress who returned to her native Minnesota to make *Far North*, which was directed by Shepard and is due out soon.

Despite the critical acclaim and the many millions of dollars her movies have earned, she refuses to describe herself as a "star".

"I think of myself more as a character actress," she says. "With every role I like to discover another part of myself."

And as for her still-intact status as one of the world's most beautiful, and sexy, leading women, she thinks it's very funny.

"Sexy...? That's good to hear," she says with a laugh. "After three children and no waistline, that's amazing!"

From Neil Blincoe in *Miami*

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